

Takehaya

Illust:
AsakuraShinji





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INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOU!?

Kickstarter Backer Stories Collection 2



Invaders of the Rokujouma!? Kickstarter Backer Stories Collection 2 [Complete]

1. [Part 1](#)
2. [Part 2](#)
3. [Part 3](#)
4. [Part 4](#)
5. [Part 5](#)
6. [Part 6](#)
7. [Part 7](#)

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Story 07 — Ruthkania Nye

Pardomshiha I

Requested by changhao zhou

Maki had suggested the experiment, but Yurika was the one running it. Maki herself was focused on observing and recording the results, which brought about certain misfortune...

“You’re touching me right now,” said Theia.

“Really? It feels like I’m touching the TV remote,” replied Koutarou.

The experiment, you see, involved a new spell. Maki was a master of indigo magic and had long wondered if she could manipulate a target’s relationship with reality. Rather than simply creating a false vision as per illusions, she wanted a spell that could control the way someone perceived reality via all five senses.

“H-Hey, watch where you put your hands!”

“Whoa, sorry! What even was that?”

“This!”

“I can’t see what ‘this’ is!”

Right now, Theia looked and felt just like a TV remote to Koutarou. The spell Yurika had cast on him interfered with his senses, altering the tactile, olfactory, auditory, visual, and gustatory associations in his brain to manipulate his perception of specific things around him.

“I must say, Maki-sama... this is an incredible spell,” said Ruth.

Ruth was presently seated next to Theia, but she looked the same as she always did to Koutarou. Theia was the only person he was seeing differently.

“I agree. This would be perfect for infiltration missions,” concurred Theia. “You could make yourself appear as a dog or cat, or even keep

people from hearing alarms or other security warnings.”

“That’s nice and all,” interjected Koutarou, “but I gotta say that the talking remote is kinda freaking me out.”

“Shut it, you!”

The viability of this new spell for stealth-based missions was precisely what Maki had had in mind when she created it. By manipulating a target’s perception of reality, she could easily conceal herself and others, going as far as waltzing into an enemy base recognized as superior officers. Once perfected, this new spell would have limitless uses.

“Thank you very much. But it’s not complete... Her voice is still the same, and I can’t yet control exactly how the target perceives things,” Maki explained.

“Wait, so Theia’s not a remote because Yurika sucks at magic?” Koutarou asked.

“You’re so mean, Satomi-san!” Yurika whined.

It was true that Yurika hadn’t intentionally made Theia appear as a TV remote. The spell was essentially random, drawing freely from associations in the target’s mind. That would have to be fine-tuned. Moreover, it seemed the auditory interference wasn’t perfect—the remote was speaking with Theia’s voice rather than beeping. Like Maki said, the spell still needed some work before it was useable outside of an experimental setting.

“Yurika, undo the spell for a moment.”

“Okaaay.”

Yurika dismissed the spell, and the remote in Koutarou’s hand suddenly turned into Theia... which was quite a shock to him, as he had his arms wrapped around her waist.

“Whoa!”

“That’s a rather rude reaction to have to your liege.”

“Yes, do forgive me for being so surprised to see a remote turn into a princess!”

While Koutarou had had his arms around Theia this whole time,

the spell had made it feel like he was simply holding a remote in his hand. If it weren't for the fact that it talked, Koutarou never would have known it wasn't real.

"Satomi-kun, can I ask you to help out with the experiment some more?"

"Sure. But don't you think you should try it on someone else too?"

"No. Clan-san said that experiments should be conducted with the same test subject to ensure accuracy in the data."

"That sounds like something she would say, yeah."

"We'll test your perception of Ruth-san next."

"Ruth-san, huh? This should be fun."

"Heehee. Please be gentle with me, Master."

"Don't worry. I wouldn't play rough with anyone but Theia."

"What was that, you oaf?!"

Maki had taken Clan's advice about controls and repeated trials quite seriously. This research meant a great deal to her, and she approached it with due diligence.

And so Maki moved to the next round of experimentation. Yurika would again cast the spell on Koutarou, but this time it would alter his perception of Ruth.

"Replace Recognition!" Yurika incanted.

Theia had appeared as a talking remote to Koutarou in the first trial, and Maki needed to know if the same thing would happen again. There was a small flash of light, and then, all of a sudden...

"..."

The look in Koutarou's eyes changed. He stared at Ruth intently, looking her up and down repeatedly. Ruth blushed furiously, unused to such attention.

"W-Well?" she asked expectantly, anxious to know how he saw her.

“Your voice is still the same.”

“And my appearance? How do I look?”

Based on Koutarou’s reaction, she could only assume it was something wonderful. She was hoping he saw her as an alluring woman.

“That’s—”

Koutarou hesitated for a moment. How could he describe it?

She looks like a ten-centimeter beetle. The 15,000 yen kind...

That was easily what he would have once said, but he’d matured considerably over the past two years. He knew better now. He knew even suggesting that he preferred beetles to Ruth would be suicide.

If he’d been able to control his reaction better, he could have told her the truth outright. But Ruth had stopped getting angry when she saw beetles recently... and Koutarou didn’t want to ruin that. He knew saying that she was beetle in his eyes would make her *extremely* unhappy.

“Y-You look like a butterfly with orange wings. I was just taken in by your beauty...”

Koutarou also knew that saying something completely out of character would be suspicious, so he’d chosen a different bug as a compromise. Surely no girl would object to being compared to a butterfly, right?

“Is that so? Teehee, so I’m a butterfly...”

It seemed Koutarou had made the right choice. He couldn’t see the expression Ruth was making, but the delighted tone of her voice said he was scot-free.

Phew... That was close...

Koutarou tried his best to keep a straight face as relief washed over him. He knew Ruth would ultimately forgive him for just about anything, but she was downright terrifying when she got angry. Koutarou was overjoyed to escape an encounter with berserker Ruth.

“Oh...?”

Yet try as he might to keep a straight face, Maki was wise to him. Not only was she skilled at reading others thanks to her indigo magic, but she was particularly attuned to Koutarou. She couldn't *not* notice.

"Satomi-kun," she whispered as she tugged on Koutarou's sleeve.

"What is it, Aika-san?" he whispered back.

"What do you really see?"

Maki was talking quietly enough that Koutarou was confident no one else could hear her. He was also confident that there was no point in lying to Maki, a master of reading minds and detecting deception. Thus, he told her the truth.

"...A ten-centimeter beetle..."

"!"

When Maki heard Koutarou's whispered answer, she understood the situation immediately. She was willing to keep quiet about the truth so as not to put Koutarou in a precarious situation, but she dutifully recorded what he'd actually seen in her notes.

"Hey! What are you two whispering about?!" Theia shouted.

Not one for discretion, Theia demanded to know what all the secrecy was about. In truth, she was just mad that Koutarou had seen Ruth as a butterfly while she was a remote.

"You're up to something, aren't you? What did you just write down? Show me too!"

"N-No!"

"Y-You idiot!"

"Let's see here... 'Correction: Satomi-kun actually saw Ruth-san as a ten-centimeter beetle.' Wait, what?!"

In that moment, Theia realized her fatal mistake. Her face turned pale, but there was nothing she could do to stop the nightmare to come.

Story 08 — Ruthkania Nye

Pardomshiha II

Requested by KanjiTatsumiSoT

The dawn of knighthood on Earth could be traced back to the days of ancient warfare. Only the affluent could afford horses, meaning the title of “knight” indicated social standing as much as anything.

“Master, it appears that there were differences in how knights came to be on Earth versus Forthorthe.”

Ruth, who was passionately reading the display, looked up to smile at Koutarou. Her eyes were sparkling and there was a palpable excitement in her voice. Koutarou and Ruth, you see, were at a special exhibit at the museum detailing the rise and fall of knights. Ruth was curious to learn about their history on Earth, so she’d asked Koutarou to bring her.

“How did it go in Forthorthe?” he asked.

Koutarou was curious about the history of knights too, but from the Forthorthian perspective. Given his past, he had something of a personal interest in the matter.

“The first knights of Forthorthe were newly emerging provincial lords who took up arms to protect their territories,” Ruth happily explained.

The establishment of knighthood in Forthorthe took place a few hundred years before Alaia’s time. The knights themselves were originally provincial lords, but as towns and fields grew larger, so too did criminal enterprise. The knighthood then became a coalition of organized professional soldiers to defend the people and their property from harm.

“So before that, there wasn’t much distinction between soldiers and civilians, huh?”

“In times of war, farmers and merchants would take up arms to fight.”

“It seems Earth’s knights were mounted warriors from the start, though.”

“In Forthorthe, soldiers weren’t mounted until after knighthood was established. Wealthy lords would supply their personal bands with war horses, you see. And after they achieved great things in battle, they came to be known as knights.”

“I see... So on Earth, they started off as wealthy people with horses; and in Forthorthe, they started off as professional infantry.”

Koutarou and Ruth continued to tour the exhibit as they talked. As an Earthling and a Forthorthian, they were enjoying comparing what they knew about knights.

“How interesting, Master. I see that even on Earth, knights shifted into being professional soldiers.”

“Perhaps because society grew more complex as the population increased?”

“I imagine so. With farmers and merchants as regular soldiers, any planet would want a professional taking charge.”

Despite the difference in how they got their starts, however, it seemed Earth knights and Forthorthian knights followed similar trajectories for a time. As the scale of war grew, farmers and merchants on the battlefield became less practical. Trained fighters like knights were a valuable asset then, particularly as commanders; so it only made sense for lords to try and amass them.

“And the ideals of chivalry came later, huh? On Earth, that happened after knights were connected to religion.”

“It was the same in Forthorthe. Those who adhered to the virtues of the Goddess of Dawn were highly prized as knights.”

“But... then the rise of mercenaries sort of took the militarism out of knighthood. I guess war just got *too* big, huh?”

That was where the paths of Earthling and Forthorthian knights diverged once again. New methods of warfare eventually spelled the popular end of knights on Earth. Mercenaries took their place, leaving many knights to choose between becoming mercenaries themselves or falling to ruin.

“So, what happened to Forthorthian knights?” Koutarou asked.

“Forthorthian knights were always soldiers, so they were somewhat mercenary to begin with. They only grew stronger as time went on, too, so any bands of mercenaries were no threat to them.”

“Hmm, so I guess that’s more like what happened to Japanese warriors.”

“Oh, I learned a little about those in class.”

“Like Forthorthian knights, they were a social class that specialized in battle. And the feudal lord who separated farmers and samurai tried to take over the country.”

“When you say that he tried, do you mean he ultimately failed?”

“Yeah. His subordinates rebelled against him.”

“But if he had subordinates, does that mean that the separation was a success?”

“Yeah, it was. Just like in Forthorthe, the need for professionals was inevitable.”

Their discussion of knights and knighthood eventually reached Japanese samurai. Koutarou wasn’t exactly a history buff, but he’d gotten a good education on the Sengoku period from manga and video games. He at least knew enough to be able to answer Ruth’s questions.

“Speaking of rebellions, were there ever any against the royal families of Forthorthe?”

“You stopped two of them yourself, Master.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Heehee, I know. There are records of three different rebellions that you weren’t involved in.”

“Three?! Is everyone okay?! Well, I guess if you’re here to tell the tale, then...”

“Suppressing them all was difficult. We were fortunate to have the royal family split into multiple families.”

“So people like Maxfern or Vandarion weren’t all that common?”

“You had a considerable influence on that, Master.”

“I did?”

“Yes. The chivalry you demonstrated has had a lasting effect on the hearts of the people for over two thousand years. There’s been very little dissent in the empire, and treasonous plots are often exposed by citizens themselves.”

“That’s just how dear Forthorthe is to its people, and that’s all thanks to Empress Alaia’s hard work. I was just a poster child, not the actual cause,” Koutarou said with a smile and a shrug.

Ruth could only think one thing as she looked at him in that moment...

It’s precisely that humility and dignity that has earned you the people’s eternal respect.

She felt, however, that Koutarou realizing that about himself would only spoil his splendor—which was a point of frustration for her.

“Well, anyway, there’s a permanent exhibit here on samurai. Wanna check that out too?”

“Oh, yes, of course!”

As they moved on to the next exhibit together, Ruth smiled bitterly at her own self-interest while giving thanks in her heart. She was glad that she’d met Koutarou here on Earth, for if she’d come to know him as the Blue Knight first, she was sure her respect for him would keep her from loving him as a normal girl.

Story 09 — Sanae Higashihongan I

Requested by Eternal Wanderer

Sanae possessed two personalities: Sanae-chan who'd become a ghost, and Sanae-san who'd remained with her body. They were reunited after a certain incident, but had yet to fully synthesize into one person. Effectively, one personality was more dominant than the other based on the circumstances. The split between them was even more pronounced, however, when Sanae-chan would astral project, leaving her body in full control of Sanae-san—like right now.

“Wh-What is your occupation?” a nervous Sanae-san asked.

“University student,” Harumi calmly replied.

The two girls, sitting across the tea table from one another, were like polar opposites.

“What’s this supposed to be, some sort of marriage interview?!” Sanae-chan shouted, infuriated.

“B-But I don’t know what to talk about...” Sanae-san stammered.

“No buts! Just talk about whatever comes to mind! Something, anything! Or else this will be totally pointless!”

“U-Um, the weather sure is nice, isn’t it?” Sanae-san ventured.

“It’s raining, though...” Harumi sighed.

“Seriously, is this supposed to be a marriage interview?!” Sanae-chan clamored.

Sanae-chan was trying to help Sanae-san overcome her shyness. Because of Sanae-chan’s strong bond with Koutarou and the others, she often took control when she was around them. Even when Sanae-san was at the helm, she never lasted long before retreating into her shell. When people she wasn’t familiar with were around, like Kenji, she wouldn’t even come out at all. Sanae-chan took issue with this and had recruited everyone to help get Sanae-san to open up some.

“Now, now, calm down, Sanae-chan. Getting angry all of a sudden will only have the opposite effect.”

“But you’re the nicest person out of *all* of us, so if she’s like this with you... I don’t even want to think about what’s going to happen with the others!”

Things had only just gotten started, and Sanae-chan felt like she was at the end of her rope.

“She’s a shy girl, so why don’t we start by asking her some questions instead?” Shizuka asked.

“Be my guest,” Sanae-chan replied.

“Okay. Since I’m the one who suggested it, allow me,” Shizuka agreed, moving over next to Harumi.

When Shizuka took a seat directly across from her, Sanae-san couldn’t help looking away. Seeing that, Shizuka finally realized what she’d gotten herself into and smiled wryly.

“Okay, let’s start from the top.”

“O-Okay.”

“I’m not going to ask you anything crazy, so you don’t have to be so nervous.”

“Okay...”

“Sanae-chan came about when your spiritual energy left your body, but there was no difference between you two before that, right?”

“U-Um, that’s right... That’s what my mom says.”

Sanae had been kidnapped by Darkness Rainbow as a child and was nearly killed in one of their rituals. It rendered her soul unstable, allowing part of her spiritual being to escape her body—that was what became Sanae-chan, while what remained with her body went on to become Sanae-san. At the time they split, however, there was absolutely no difference between them in terms of personality.

“So your different paths in life changed you, right?”

“I think I turned out this way because my lack of spiritual energy kept me in the hospital a lot.”

“And I grew up strong, like any ghost girl should!”

Ultimately, their circumstances had a profound effect on them. Sanae-chan lived as she pleased while she was a ghost, which kept her rather carefree and childish. Meanwhile, Sanae-san grew rather reserved because she didn't get to spend much time around other people when she was sick. Their different experiences explained the disconnect between them now.

“Can I speak?” Maki asked, raising her hand.

Maki's master, Maya, was the one responsible for separating Sanae's soul from her body, so this conversation held great interest for Maki. She was curious about one thing, however.

“Yeah, I guess I'll allow *proper* magical girls to say their piece,” Sanae-chan jeered.

“You can't say that, Sanae-chan! You need to be kinder!” Sanae-san scolded her other self.

“Auuugh... Sanae-chan...” Yurika cried.

While the not-so-proper magical girl shed bitter tears, Maki asked what had been on her mind.

“This is a rather simple question... but do the two of you really want to go back to being one? Or do you prefer things as they are?”

There were multiple ways to reunite split personalities by spiritual or magical means. Sanae-chan could absorb Sanae-san, or the other way around. They could also be fused together as equals. Generally speaking, those were their three options. Based on the way Sanae-chan was trying to help Sanae-san come out of her shell, it seemed they were going for an equal fusion of their personalities... But at the same time, the way they both acknowledged each other suggested they were rejecting the very idea of fusing. Maki felt like that issue needed to be addressed before they could reach any proper closure on the matter.

“Me, personally? I don't really care either way, but I feel like it would be kind of a waste to become one.”

“I... um... think I prefer things this way myself...”

In the end, it seemed both Sanaes were happy with the current

state of affairs. Maki, however, detected a nuanced difference in the way they expressed it.

“Why?” she asked, digging deeper.

Maki knew Sanae-san would have difficulty answering her, but that was inherently part of why she was asking in the first place. She wanted to know what lay beneath the surface.

“It would be a total pain if we couldn’t separate like this.”

“I...”

Sanae-chan’s answer was as clear as could be, but Sanae-san hardly said a word. Realizing this, Sanae-chan couldn’t help having a little fun with her.

“Heh, she just wants to make me do all the stuff she’s bad at. Like talking with people and exercising.”

“S-Sanae-chan!”

Thus exposed by her other half, Sanae-san flew into a panic. Even when she was projecting, you see, Sanae-chan’s ghostly form was tethered to her body—the two Sanaes were always connected. It was pointless for one to try and hide something from the other.

“D-Don’t tell me—”

That was when it hit Koutarou. He suddenly realized Sanae-chan was going out of her way to teach Sanae-san how to talk to people.

“You’re planning on making Sanae-san do everything *you’re* bad at, aren’t you?!”

Sanae-chan and Sanae-san were two halves of the same whole. They shared thoughts and feelings, and the only real difference between them was how they expressed them. In other words, if Sanae-san wanted Sanae-chan to do everything she was bad at... then the reverse was also true.

“If the two of you become one, or Sanae-san retreats any further into her shell, then *you’ll* have to study and go to classes all on your own!”

“Ack, you figured me out!”

Koutarou was right on the money. Sanae-chan wanted Sanae-san to pull herself together for entirely selfish reasons. This, of course, infuriated Koutarou.

“Both of you, come sit right over here! I’ll beat that twisted spirit of yours straight!”

“Now, now... Calm down, Satomi-kun.”

“You’re too soft on them, Landlord-san!”

“Hey, look at me! I’m sweet little Sanae-san! You wouldn’t eeever be mean to meee!”

“Don’t go using yourself like a puppet!”

“So that didn’t work, huh?”

“You really are the worst...”

“Teehee!”

And so Sanae-chan’s plan to manipulate Sanae-san into doing her bidding came to an abrupt end. That didn’t stop her, however, from trying to use Sanae-san as a shield against the angry Koutarou.

“Sanae-chan, w-we should apologize...”

“Who cares? You know he loves us!”

“Ever heard of tough love, Sanae?!”

“Oh crap! Did I seriously mess this up?!”

“Get back here!”

Unfortunately for Sanae, Koutarou’s anger wouldn’t be abated so easily. She was forced to sit through a rather lengthy lecture, though it was far more a punishment for Sanae-chan than Sanae-san, who listened to him intently rather than trying to run away.

Story 10 — Sanae Higashihongan II

Requested by Drone205

Yurika was in the throes of distress. She'd made a catastrophic blunder.

You see, in order to put the past behind him and his father, Koutarou had decided to complete the half-knit sweater his late mother left behind. Before he got to work on it, however, he wanted to show it to Harumi. He would only have one chance at finishing the sweater, so failure wasn't an option. That was why he wanted his knitting mentor's advice on the project.

"I-I have to find it before Satomi-san notices! Or else!"

Yurika looked like she'd just opened Pandora's box. In fact, in her eyes, this crisis was even worse than that. Harumi had given her the sweater to return to Koutarou... and she'd misplaced it somewhere.

"Seriously, Yurika. Of all the things to lose..."

Sanae, who'd heard the story from Yurika, regarded her with an icy cold stare. With Sanae's psychic powers, she knew better than anyone how much the sweater meant to Koutarou.

"That's why I'm asking you for help, Sanae-chan!"

Of course, Yurika knew the situation she was in. It didn't take a psychic to know the sweater was important. But most of all, Yurika was afraid of disappointing Koutarou. He meant a lot to her—so much that she was ready to sacrifice all the manga in her wardrobe if it would help find the sweater. She'd like to keep two or three series, but she was ready to give those up too if she had to.

"I'll do anything you want, so please help me find it!"

"Oh fine... But you really have to do whatever I want in exchange."

"Okay! Deal!"

And so Sanae and Yurika joined forces to locate Koutarou's keepsake.

Yurika was a magical girl, so finding a single sweater shouldn't be too hard. The matter was pressing, however, so recruiting a psychic to help was a wise move. Sanae could work far faster than Yurika.

"Oh!"

Sanae suddenly came to a stop. When she did, Yurika's eyes sparkled.

"Did you find it?!"

She was excitedly hopeful for good news, but unfortunately, Sanae shook her head.

"No, I just smelled the taiyaki they're selling over there. I really want some!"

"Can you please take this more seriously?!"

"You said you'd do whatever I wanted, didn't you?"

"Ugh... Okay, hold on."

Yurika opened up her wallet and checked its contents before tearfully heading towards the taiyaki stall. This would set her back a bit on buying manga for the week.

"Here, I got you this..."

"It looks delicious! Do you want half?"

"I'm not hungry..."

"Really? More for me then!"

Sanae bit into the taiyaki with a smile. She was the type to start with the head of the fish-shaped cake, as she felt it was a shame not to eat the part with the most filling while it was still warm.

"Sanae-chan, can you please look for the sweater now? I don't mind if you eat while you're doing it!"

"Just calm down, Yurika. We'll start over there!"

“...At the soft serve ice cream stall?”

“You betcha!”

Sanae giggled brightly as she took another bite out of her taiyaki. It wasn't often she got to have taiyaki *and* ice cream on the same day without blowing her allowance. She had no intention of letting this opportunity slip by.

“Will you look for the sweater after getting ice cream?!”

Yurika knew she couldn't turn Sanae down after promising to do whatever she wanted, but she wanted to find the sweater as soon as possible. She was desperate.

“Yeah, yeah. It's fine. Just go get me ice cream.”

In stark contrast to Yurika's frantic worry, Sanae seemed to be enjoying herself.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I'm sure.”

“Okay, hold on...”

Though uneasy about Sanae's behavior, Yurika eventually folded. It wasn't like she had any other choice.

Taiyaki, soft serve, a strawberry parfait, takoyaki, crepes... Once she had her fill, Sanae was thoroughly satisfied. She rubbed her belly contently as she sipped on a banana smoothie.

“I don't think I can eat any more.”

“Sanae-chan, please! We have to find that sweater!”

“Just wait another thirty seconds.”

“Sanae-chan, I really need to find it!”

Yurika was now in tears. Sanae had continued to ask for one treat after another and so far hadn't lifted a finger to help with the search. Yurika was starting to think that she'd been duped.

“I told you to wait another thirty seconds.”

“I don’t have that long! Every second counts!”

“You wanna find that sweater, don’t you? Just hold your horses.”

“Stop being selfish and help me look for it!”

“I already did. That’s why we’re here.”

“Huh?”

Yurika went wide-eyed. She had no idea what Sanae was talking about. Sanae, however, just casually sipped down the last of her banana smoothie. But then...

“Yurika-san! Thank goodness I found you!”

“Sakuraba-senpai?!”

Harumi suddenly appeared. She ran right over the moment she saw the two girls and bowed deeply.

“I’m so sorry, Yurika-san.”

Yurika, meanwhile, was still utterly puzzled.

“Um... What’s this about, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“Oh? Could it be... that you didn’t notice?”

“Notice what?”

“I handed you the wrong bag earlier. Instead of Satomi-kun’s sweater, I accidentally gave you my yarn.”

“Huh...?”

There, Yurika’s eyes completely glazed over—a perfectly understandable reaction. After all, it turned out that her panic-stricken search had been for naught.

“I’m so sorry about the mix-up. Here’s the right package.”

Harumi handed Yurika the sweater, lovingly wrapped in paper, without even realizing the state Yurika was in. She had business to attend to, so she was in something of a rush herself.

“Well then, I’ll see you tomorrow!”

Harumi swiftly fled the scene once she put the sweater in Yurika's hands, and Sanae saw her off.

"That's why I told you to wait thirty seconds."

"You mean you knew Sakuraba-senpai was coming?"

"Yup. When I looked for the sweater, I could tell it was in her hands and that she was coming this way."

When Yurika broke down and pleaded for her help, Sanae had actually done what she was asked. She didn't want Koutarou to be upset either, so she had an investment in finding it herself. But fortunately, by the time she searched for the sweater, it was already on its way to them.

"So you were just enjoying taiyaki and ice cream while we waited?"

"That's right. If I told you Harumi had it, you would've gone running to her right away, right? I had to make sure you kept your promise first."

Sanae had kept quiet about the location of the sweater in order to get her just desserts, you could say. If she'd spilled the beans first, she knew Yurika would put her off her reward. She also knew that the sweater was in good hands with Harumi, so there was no rush to retrieve it in her eyes.

"You mean I didn't need to lift a finger?"

"Yeah, although you might've worried Koutarou that way."

"So I didn't actually need to buy you all that food?"

"Too bad you didn't go to Harumi first, huh?"

"Waaaaaaaah!"

Yurika now safely had the sweater in her hands, but she was still in tears. It had come at a high price, you see—her manga budget for the entire month.

Story 11 — Shizuka Kasagi I

Koutarou, Shizuka, and Ruth often trained in the early morning together. Koutarou and Ruth would practice with swords while Shizuka practiced karate. They would all walk to school together afterwards on weekdays, but they each kept their own schedule on weekends. Koutarou would sometimes go out to play baseball, Shizuka would often clean around Corona House, and Ruth would usually tag along with Theia on whatever business she had that day. Weekends were busy, and today was no exception.

“How long has it been since I last came to the morning market?”

“I’m surprise that you’ve *ever* been, Satomi-kun.”

“Sanae’s kicked me outta the apartment early in the morning to go buy seafood before, and I’ve helped out at the grocer though Kiriha and the neighborhood association.”

“Ahahaha, then I guess this’ll be a nice change of pace!”

After seeing Ruth off to work, Koutarou and Shizuka headed to the shopping street together for the morning market. It was still early—the clock had just struck 7 AM—but there were already plenty of people there. The morning market had a long history, you see, and the locals flocked to it fondly.

“The morning market sure is bustling.”

“There are lots of exclusive sales and things you can only buy here. It’s a little bit like a festival.”

The morning market’s origins were the periodic markets that would line the road to the shrine. Visitors would stop by the various stalls and booths on their way to or from, and that tradition eventually evolved into the morning market people knew and loved in the modern day. The shopping street was now a roofed arcade, but there was in fact a shrine further up the road.

“S-Satomi-ku— Ah!”

“Landlord-san, are you okay?!”

“S-Somehow...”

Because it was so popular, however, the morning market could be a challenge to navigate. There were so many people that it was difficult to see anything or walk without bumping into anyone. If she got serious, Shizuka could push any and everyone out of her way, but she refused to do that in a place like this. It left her bobbing and weaving through the throngs of people, following closely behind Koutarou.

“Landlord-san, what are we after today?”

“Well, you see, the bakery is having a special on creampuffs.”

“The bakery...? Ah, it’s over there.”

Koutarou stood head and shoulders over most of the crowd, so he quickly spotted their destination up ahead.

“Is there a line?”

“It doesn’t seem too bad. Looks like they just opened.”

“Then let’s go! This is what we’re here for!”

Shizuka had several shops she wanted to visit, but the bakery was first and foremost on the list. It normally sold bread and various pastries, but it had a menu of delicacies just for the morning market—and today’s special was creampuffs. Shizuka’s goal was to snag two half-dozen packs.

“Wow, there really is a limit. The sign says only one pack per customer.”

“That’s exactly why I brought you with me.”

“You’ve got this all figured out, Landlord-san.”

“Heehee... Oh, whoa!”

Shizuka was once again almost swept away by a wave of passing shoppers. She fortunately managed to break free, but Koutarou was worried they’d get separated at this rate.

“What’s wrong, Satomi-kun?”

When she noticed Koutarou staring at her intently, Shizuka cocked her head quizzically. She didn’t mind that he was staring, but she was definitely curious about why.

“Here,” Koutarou offered, extending his right hand.

“Huh?”

Shizuka stared at his hand for a moment before cocking her head even more. She wasn’t sure of the meaning behind the gesture.

“Er, well... it’s a big crowd and I don’t want to lose sight of you.”

“Oh!”

Shizuka smiled happily and quickly moved to take Koutarou’s hand... but found herself hesitating right before grabbing it. She couldn’t help getting a little shy about holding hands with the boy she loved.

“Um... I’m sorry for being so slow that I didn’t realize what you meant...”

“No, I mean... It’s my fault for never doing things like this.”

“Satomi-kun, you’ve been doing your best to treat us right lately, haven’t you?”

“You noticed?”

“Yeah... I’m thrilled, of course, but we all agreed to pretend we didn’t notice.”

“You did?!”

“Of course. We didn’t want to embarrass you or anything.”

That was the idea, anyway. Shizuka didn’t want to lose out, however, so she steeled herself and decided to make a bold play... even if it might be embarrassing.

“Let’s do this instead!”

“Huh?”

Shizuka suddenly let go of Koutarou’s hand and wrapped her arm around his.

This is how I should—no, how we should all act! So screw it! I’ll save the embarrassment for later!

To anyone who saw them, Shizuka and Koutarou looked like a couple. They were close enough to feel each other's warmth. They could even kiss if they leaned in a little more. There were normally too many people around for them to act like this, but it seemed perfectly natural for them. The sword-shaped crest on Shizuka's forehead said it all—it was simply meant to be.

“I just thought I'd try acting a little more like your girlfriend.”

“That's fine, but...”

“It is?”

“You've staked your life for me, so you're definitely more than just a friend to me.”

“Does this mean you finally get it, Satomi-kun?”

“Get what?”

“Listen, if you talk like that, a girl's gonna start expecting things.”

“Then I hope you can accept creampuffs.”

“Well, that's fine... for now.”

And so Koutarou and Shizuka made their way to the bakery. They stayed arm-in-arm as they walked, and even as they stood in line. Truth be told, Shizuka was happier about that than the creampuffs. She knew she couldn't admit that to Koutarou, however, so she simply decided she'd bring him along to the morning market more often in the future.

Story 12 — Yurika Nijino I

In the past, Yurika had only ever thought of herself. But now that she was in her third year of high school, she'd learn to think about the people around her too. Perhaps that was simply a side effect of falling in love. Naturally, she was always thinking about the boy she cared for.

“Hnnngh...”

And that was precisely why the pudding in her hands was presently causing her a great deal of distress. You see, Kiriha had sent her to the bakery to buy bread and she'd treated herself to a sample of their new pudding while she was there.

“This is definitely going to be good... But I only have one! Is it really okay for me to eat it myself? Hnnngh...”

Yurika was at her wits' end staring down deluxe pudding. The moral dilemma was this: she'd bought the pudding with everyone's money, so, strictly speaking, it wasn't *her* pudding. If she'd bought it with her own money, it would've been long gone already.

“B-B-But one serving of pudding isn't enough for everyone... I can just think of this as my reward for going out to get the bread, right? Right?”

Yurika's hands froze when she imagined someone finding the empty container and realizing what she'd done. So try as she might to convince herself that the pudding was rightfully hers, something deep down inside told her to refrain.

“I should hold off on eating it... It just doesn't feel right. Besides, no magical girl of love and courage would hog pudding like that... Oh, I know! We can just make it the prize for tonight's game!”

In the end, Yurika's modest restraint won out. It wasn't like she didn't want the gourmet pudding for herself. She'd even considered just eating half of it. But her newfound ability to put others before herself was proof of how much she'd grown, both as a normal girl and as a magical girl. However...

Ding dong!

“Delivery!”

“Kyaaaah!”

Splat!

Even though Yurika had matured considerably, her luck hadn’t changed one bit.

When Koutarou returned to room 106, the first thing he saw was an unmoving Yurika slumped against the wall. Her face was completely expressionless. If Yurika was ordinarily like an amusement park, she looked like the ruins of one now. Koutarou was taken aback by the stark change and couldn’t bring himself to ask what was wrong. Instead, he had their mutual psychic friend, Sanae, do some reconnaissance. Sanae happily walked over to Yurika and called out to her like she always did.

“Shouldn’t you go talk to her yourself, Satomi-kun?” Shizuka asked.

“Say what you will. I wouldn’t even know *how* to talk to her,” Koutarou replied.

“Mackenzie-kun wouldn’t have hesitated, you know?”

“Honestly, Landlord-san, that just tells me that restraint was the right choice.”

Koutarou and Shizuka stood in the kitchen together while Sanae worked her magic. Koutarou and Sanae had returned to the apartment first, and Shizuka arrived just as Sanae agreed to go talk to Yurika. Koutarou and Shizuka chatted while they waited for her to return.

“I’m back!” Sanae called after a few minutes, cheerfully wandering back into the kitchen.

“Well? What’s up with Yurika-chan?” Shizuka asked.

“Long story short: she dropped the one and only pudding when the delivery guy surprised her,” Sanae explained.

“So she’s just upset that she didn’t get to eat it, huh? She’s hopeless,” Koutarou sighed.

Now that he knew what was going on, Koutarou pushed aside the interior curtain to get a peek into the inner room. Yurika was still

leaning against the wall, unmoving. It seemed her conversation with Sanae, however, had moved her to tears.

“That’s not it,” Sanae continued to explain. “She said she picked it up at the bakery. Apparently she debated about whether she should eat it herself or save it as a prize for tonight’s game... and just as she decided to save it, the doorbell rang and scared her while she was putting it in the fridge.”

Yurika had only told Sanae about dropping the pudding, but Sanae could read between the lines with her psychic powers. Sanae knew her better judgement had won out and that she was trying to save the pudding, so she couldn’t help feeling sorry for her.

“You mean Yurika tried to do something nice, but her bad luck got in the way?” Koutarou asked.

“I feel for her... Go do something to cheer her up, Satomi-kun,” Shizuka encouraged.

“Me?!”

“Who else? She *tried* to do something nice for all of us, you know.”

“Still, I think you should go talk to her instead, Landlord-san.”

“What’s the matter, Satomi-kun? Why won’t you go help out a *dear*, *sweet* friend of yours? You *like* her, don’t you?” Shizuka asked with an impish smile.

Koutarou quickly realized where she was going with this line of questioning and conceded before she could get any further with it.

“Fine... I’ll do it.”

You see, Yurika was more than just a friend to Koutarou. He was more aware of that than ever before, and he didn’t particularly want Shizuka poking and prodding him about it.

As for Yurika, Koutarou’s first task was getting her to raise her head. He chose a direct method, grabbing her face with both hands and forcibly raising her head for her. His next task was to put the usual sparkle back in her eye. He’d have to rely on some outside help for this one, but he had a plan.

“I think homemade pudding is a great idea!” Sanae proclaimed.

“I’m just glad you’re here, Landlord-san...” Koutarou sighed.

“I don’t mind helping out, Satomi-kun, but you’ve still got to be the star of the show,” Shizuka giggled.

Koutarou had put a smile back on Yurika’s face by suggesting they all make pudding together. Right now, Yurika was diligently heating up some milk on the stove. Koutarou stood next to her, recipe book in hand.

“It says to cut the heat when it starts to froth around the brim.”

“So before it really starts bubbling?”

“Yeah, I think the idea is to keep it from actually boiling.”

“Keep it from boiling, huh? That sounds tricky.”

“Put it on low, just to be on the safe side.”

“Oh, that could have been bad... I had it on high.”

Fortunately for Koutarou and Yurika, pudding wasn’t terribly complicated to make. The only ingredients were milk, eggs, sugar, and vanilla flavoring—all of which they had in the apartment. They were using a recipe from a cookbook Shizuka had borrowed from the home ec club, and they were lucky enough to have Shizuka on hand to explain anything they didn’t understand.

“Now then, I guess I should start the caramel syrup.”

Shizuka was also personally handling the most difficult step for beginners: the caramel syrup. The process only involved heating sugar, but it was surprisingly easy to burn.

“Are you sure you should leave them to their own devices?” Sanae asked skeptically.

“Even if they screw things up a little, don’t you think they could use some time alone together?” Shizuka asked in turn.

“Heh, yeah, I guess so. You’re a good friend, Shizuka.”

“You are too, aren’t you, Sanae-chan?”

“Yup!”

And so, with Sanae acting as her assistant, Shizuka got to work on the caramel syrup. Since it was used in all kinds of other recipes, she had plenty of experience making it. As long as Sanae didn't mess up the measurements, Shizuka was sure it would turn out great. There was far more cause for concern on the other side of the kitchen...

“What should I do next?” Yurika asked.

“Beat the sugar and eggs, then mix in the milk,” reported Koutarou.

“Like this?”

“No, not so fast! You gotta go slow with the hot milk so you don't scramble the eggs!”

“Whoops!”

“...You really are careless...”

“That's why I'm glad you're here to help, Satomi-kun.”

“I can't approve of your reliance on other people.”

“That's okay. I love you whether you help me out or not.”

“H-Hey! Stop getting off topic and focus on the pudding!”

“Okaaaay!”

Even if they royally screwed up the recipe, they could always remake it. Yurika was smiling again now, and it would take more than some scrambled pudding to change that.

Story 13 — Yurika Nijino II

Requested by Anonymous

Nalfa meant well. She really, truly did. There was just one little hiccup while putting together a feature on Princess Theiamillis's Blue Knights... A little hiccup that led to the article on Yurika on the front page of the pangalactic network.

“Wh-What’s with this article about me?!”

“I’m sorry! I’m so, so sorry!”

“Since when am I an expert on chemical warfare?!”

Nijino Yurika was the chemical expert of Theiamillis's Blue Knights. She was also known for healing Lord Raisharn of the Sarion family. Her incredible skillset—offensive, defensive, and medical—made her the ideal knight, if a little on the brainy side.

At least... that’s how she was portrayed in Nalfa’s article about her, which included videos of Yurika using sleeping gas and acid to incapacitate her enemies. Thanks to that, 99 percent of Forthorthe now believed she was indeed an expert on chemical warfare—an image Yurika herself wanted nothing to do with.

“I’m nothing like that! I’m a magical girl of love and courage!”

“I’m really sorry, but I couldn’t report the real truth! All the footage of anything magical had to be cut!”

The feature on the Blue Knights had started out well. Theia, Ruth, and Koutarou were introduced normally. In Koutarou’s case, his magical and spiritual abilities were explained away as advanced features of his armor. Things got a little stickier with Yurika’s introduction, however. Because Yurika had achieved great things on the battlefield, her contributions to the Blue Knights couldn’t be glossed over or minimized... but Nalfa couldn’t reveal to the Forthorthian public that Yurika was a magician. Torn over what to do, Nalfa ultimately decided to spin Yurika as a chemical weapons expert. She thought it was an honest compromise.

“Couldn’t you have said *anything* else?! Now I sound like some

villain!”

Needless to say, Yurika wasn't pleased with Nalfa's decision. She was a magical girl of love and courage, and she took great pride in that when she fought. Nalfa's article, however, gave Forthorthe an entirely different impression.

“Look at that! She used poison gas to attack through a wall!”

“She must have used a tiny pipe or something to siphon it through!”

“If it's tiny enough that we can't even see it in the footage, just how powerful is that gas she's using?!”

“Yeah, must be brutal. But even so, she didn't kill anyone with it. She must have calculated its effects and dosage with extreme precision.”

“I'm sure glad she's fighting for the Blue Knight and the royal families. I bet we'd see a lot more casualties if she were on the enemy side.”

“Chemical warfare can be a villainous thing, you know. Knock on wood...”

The people of Forthorthe lauded Yurika far and wide, heralding her as a leading mind in biochemical warfare. After all, she could discretely take out throngs of enemies without causing them any harm. She was so brilliant and powerful, in fact, that it made people wary.

“Th-That's why I included the part about you healing Lord Raisharn! I wanted to soften your impression a little!”

“It didn't work at all! Just look at these comments!”

Nalfa had done her best to paint Yurika in a positive light... but it would apparently take a little more than that to warm people up to a chemical weapons genius.

“Y-You just fight too neatly, Yurika-san! You should try struggling a little more or throwing in some other tricks!”

“That's not what I'm thinking about when I'm fighting!”

When lives were on the line, Yurika didn't care what people thought of her or how she fought. The only thing on her mind in the heat of battle was saving people. That was what truly made her a magical girl, and her earnest heart had served her well. A little *too*

well, by Nalfa's estimation. Yurika's victories were so overwhelming and decisive that they made an incredible impression. By the time her enemies saw her, it was often too late for them. It was virtually sinister.

Devastated by her newly-acquired reputation in Forthorthe, however, Yurika began undergoing training to make her seem less villainous in battle.

"How about this one, Yurika? Fifteen enemies round a corner after you, but an innocent child happens to be walking by at the same time. What do you do?"

"I... guess I'd use a Sleeping Cloud spell?"

"Good answer. If you put them all to sleep, the child won't be hurt. That's an excellent strategy, but it still relies on a gas attack, doesn't it?"

"Augh..."

Yurika had come to Maki for help learning to fight like a proper magical girl. She seemed wholly unaware of the irony, however, given that Maki herself was once an evil magical girl.

"Yurika, you rely too much on the strength of your mana," Maki explained.

"You think so?" she asked.

"Yes. I couldn't make poison or gas that effective."

By Maki's assessment, Yurika's problem was power. She could easily use her extraordinary mana to hypercharge spells beyond the limits of what they were ordinarily capable of doing, which was why her magic was so effective. You see, spells that rendered targets unconscious, asleep, or otherwise incapacitated were all or nothing—if they didn't work, they had no effect whatsoever. Yurika's spells, however, *always* worked.

But if a normal magician like Maki cast a sleep spell on a crowd of fifteen enemies, as per the above example she'd given Yurika, a handful of them would inevitably remain awake. That's why Maki would never rely on such a strategy. Instead, she would have simply cast an invisibility spell on the child to buy her enough time to defeat the enemies—and *that* was the way Yurika needed to think in order to

fight “more like a magical girl.”

“Why is Yurika trying to figure out how to get weaker?” Koutarou wondered aloud.

He was currently sitting in the corner of room 106, watching Maki and Yurika discuss Yurika’s so-called training at the tea table. Harumi, seated next to him, poured him another cup of tea as she replied with a wry smile.

“Well, she said that, at this rate, she wouldn’t be able to call herself a magical girl of love and courage anymore.”

Yurika now had a reputation in Forthorthe, and it wouldn’t be easy to change it. There was still Folsaria and the underground to consider, however, so she at least wanted make sure they saw her in a good light.

“What? She’s the perfect magical girl.”

After countless battles, Yurika had grown. Koutarou knew better than anyone that she was a true soldier of love and courage. As such, he couldn’t help seeing this so-called training as rather pointless.

“Heehee. I think everything would be resolved if you just told her that, Satomi-kun.”

“But she’s worried about her reputation with the Folsarians and the People of the Earth, right? Not me.”

“Honestly, Satomi-kun, we all struggle with how dense you can be.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Can you blame us? Even if the whole world misunderstands us, we don’t care as long as those closest to us know our hearts. A handful of precious friends can change everything, teehee.”

“A handful of precious friends, huh...?”

Even the obtuse Koutarou understood that sentiment. He too felt like he wouldn’t need anyone else to understand him as long as his closest companions did. And if Yurika felt the same way, his encouragement might be just what she needed right now.

“Hey, Yurika.”

Koutarou considered Yurika a precious friend, and he didn't like seeing her down on herself like this. A little embarrassment was a small price to pay if it would get her smiling again.

“What is it, Satomi-san?”

“Knock this off already, would you?”

“But—”

“We already know that you're a magical girl of love and courage. Isn't that good enough?”

“S-Satomi-san...”

Yurika's eyes shot wide open at Koutarou's unexpected words, the gloomy expression wiped completely off her face.

“O-Okay, I'll stop!” she agreed. “This is too much like studying anyway!”

“Just make sure you apologize to Aika-san.”

“Okaaay! I'm sorry for dragging you into this, Maki-chan.”

“Heehee. Don't worry. I'm always here for you.”

“Thank you, Maki-chan... But now I'm hungry.”

“We have some dorayaki.”

“Really?! Gimme!”

It was just like Harumi said. All it took was a few kind words from Koutarou and Yurika was happily feasting away on dorayaki. It seemed she was no longer worried about her reputation as a genius of chemical warfare... at least for the time being.